

TSP

USDA Conservation Program Forester's Guide to Technical Service Provider

What is a Technical Service Provider?

Technical Service Providers (TSP) are individuals or groups outside of the U.S. Department of Agriculture who are certified to provide technical assistance on behalf of the USDA. Technical assistance includes planning and implementing conservation practices to address natural resource issues.

In addition to providing conservation financial assistance from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), NRCS now has the ability to reimburse USDA conservation program participants for conservation technical assistance provided by private consulting foresters that are certified TSPs.

All technical assistance provided by TSPs must meet NRCS standards and policy, and this means that foresters must have their name on the Technical Service Provider Registry or TechReg listing of certified TSPs. TSPs make an on-line application and qualifications are verified.

Go to <http://techreg.usda.gov/> to find out how to get on the register and to apply for an e-Authentication Level 2 Account and apply on-line. There is also a Forester's Guide which can be downloaded from the Maine NRCS web site www.me.nrcs.usda.gov. Click on "Technical Service Provider" under "Quick Access" to obtain the "Forester's Guide to the Technical Service Provider Program".

Available Categories of Technical Service

Most consulting foresters will certify as TSPs under the Forestry/Agroforestry category which includes such practices for both timber and wildlife production as forest stand improvement, riparian forest buffer, tree/shrub establishment,

forest site preparation, tree/shrub pruning, and firebreak. Other categories that foresters may qualify for with proper credentials include Soil Stabilization for Access (Roads) category, which covers forest trails and landings; and Wildlife categories, which cover early successional habitat development and management, upland wildlife management, hedgerow planting, and restoration and management of declining habitats.

How much funding is available for the TSP program in 2005?

TSP program by the end of 2005 will have used approximately 1 million dollars to provide technical assistance to program participants through individual TSPs, business TSPs and contribution agreements.

How much funding is available for the cost share programs in 2005?

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) has over 7 million dollars and the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) has over 1 million dollars available for financial assistance in implementing conservation practices, including forestry, wildlife, and soil erosion control on forestland.

The EQIP funding varies by local working group (NRCS field office area). To find out what percent of their allocation the local working groups in your service area have set aside for forestry funding go to the Maine NRCS web site <http://www.me.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/2005EQIPApplicationInfo.html> and pick the county you are interested in. The "program delivery description" provides the information on the local priorities and the percent of allocated funds to those priorities. The "practice cost list" provides

information on the various practices and their costs.

The WHIP funding may be used for restoration, improvement and maintenance of critical forest habitat as identified by the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, such as deer wintering yards, and other important wildlife habitat. Check out the fact sheet on the Maine NRCS web site for more information.



Payment Rates

The USDA contract is with the conservation program participant and they are responsible for making payment to the TSP. When the TSP documents completion of the job, NRCS will reimburse the program participant according to established rates.

TSP payments are based on Not-to-Exceed (NTE) rates. NTE rates are available on the TechReg home page. Use the Quick Access menu on the left side to select NTE rates.

The NTE rate is the maximum amount that will be paid by USDA for technical assistance. In other words, TSPs will receive a payment for the actual cost of their services up to the NTE rate, as approved in the customers USDA program contract. The program participant is responsible to pay any charges in excess of the NTE rates.

TSPs are responsible for reporting the work as completed using the Progress Reporting System (TechPRS) site located on the TechReg web site. They also are responsible for giving the customer and NRCS an itemized statement of service charges listed by the three phases of

installation: design, installation, and checkout. An assignment of payment form signed by the participant will allow payment to be sent directly to the TSP.

How do your customers get involved in this program?

Encourage your customers that presently have a cost-share program contract with NRCS to check on using a TSP to assist in the implementation of their practices. Also encourage your customers to sign up for the EQIP and WHIP programs to get technical and financial assistance in implementing their conservation forestry and wildlife practices.

Encourage your customers to contact their local forestry state representatives and ask them to attend the local working group meetings to promote forestry. Your customers can also contact their local Soil & Water Conservation District Supervisors to let them know their forestry concerns and issues that they would like them to address.

On the TechReg web site, the consulting foresters certified as TSPs are listed in "Find a Technical Service Provider." Click on the state of interest, followed by the county. All TSPs approved to work in the selected county that have registered on TechReg are listed. TSPs can also be selected by choosing the service of interest. TSP resumes are listed with contact information and references.

Using a TSP – The process

TSP reimbursement is currently available only for USDA customers participating in Farm Bill programs. Provisions for using a TSP must be approved and included in the USDA conservation program contract – so it is necessary for foresters to let their clients know that they need to inform the NRCS if they want to use a TSP.

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